

David Harold Pitzely

Born: July 31, 1924
Hometown: Bronx, NY
Class: 1944
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: February 5, 1943 / 52N, 33W
Date / Place of burial: February 5, 1943 / Lost at Sea --
52N, 33W
Age: 18



Two months before his seventeenth birthday David Pitzely's parents gave him permission to begin sailing in the merchant marine. He initially signed on aboard the passenger ship *SS Talamanca* in May 23, 1941 as part of the ship's Stewards Department. However, he subsequently sailed as Ordinary Seaman aboard the *SS Hibueras*, *SS Mormacyork* and *SS Santa Monica* between June 26, 1941 and September 9, 1942. The Deck Cadets aboard each of these ships may have been David's inspiration for applying to Kings Point, as he entered Kings Point days after signing off of the *SS Santa Monica*.

David H. Pitzely signed on as Deck Cadet aboard the *SS West Portal* on December 24, 1942 at New York, NY. He joined his Academy classmate Cadet-Midshipman James Province who had signed on as Engine Cadet a few days earlier. The World War I-era "Hog Islander" sailed on January 24, 1943 for Liverpool via Nova Scotia in convoy SC-118. Aboard the ship on sailing from Nova Scotia were eight officers, the two Cadets, thirty crewmen, twenty-five Navy Armed Guard and twelve passengers.



SS West Portal (ex-Emergency Aid)

The slow ships of Convoy SC-118 were sailing right behind a convoy of higher speed ships, HX 224. A survivor from one of the four ships sunk in this convoy was rescued by U-632. He told his rescuers that a large convoy of slow speed ships was behind his convoy. The German Navy's High Command alerted every available U-Boat upon receiving the news from U-632. U-Boats were sent to locations along Convoy SC-118's most likely route from Nova Scotia to the United Kingdom. On February 4 the convoy's location was revealed to searching U-Boats by the inadvertent firing of a signal rocket.

For whatever reason, the *SS West Portal* straggled behind the convoy on the evening of February 4. According to German Naval Records that became available only after the end of World War II, the *SS West Portal* was sighted by U-143 on the afternoon of February 5. The U-143 initially fired a spread of four torpedoes at the zig-zagging *West Portal* from almost two miles away. Only the third torpedo hit the *West Portal*. The submarine closed the range for a final shot but reported that it missed. A sixth and final torpedo was reported to have hit the ship near the stern which finally sunk the ship.

The U-143's Captain reported seeing some of the ship's crew and passengers abandoning ship in the lifeboats. One of the convoy escorts, *HMS Vanessa (D 29)* received the *West Portal*'s distress message and was ordered to leave the convoy to search for survivors. However, the radio message did not provide a location so the search proved fruitless. Neither the *West Portal*'s life boats nor any of the men aboard the *West Portal* were ever seen again.

The battle to get Convoy SC-118's remaining ships to port was one of the largest during the Battle of the Atlantic. Seven other merchant ships were sunk, while the convoy's escorts sank three U-Boats and damaged two more.



Benjamin, David and Minnie Pitzely

Cadet-Midshipman David H. Pitzely was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Merchant Marine Defense Bar, the Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter.

David Pitzely was the oldest of Benjamin Pitzely and Minnie Silverstein Pitzely's two sons. David's little brother, Lewis, was four years younger. According to the 1930 U.S. Census, Benjamin Pitzely was employed as a Chauffeur. David's cousin, Arthur Silverstein, recalled David as a young man with a deep love of ships and the sea. As a youth he had belonged to one of New York's many junior naval organizations before starting his life at sea.